Appreciating Linguistics: A typological approach
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Lecture – 47
Semantic Typology – Part 4

Hello everyone. Welcome to this session of our NPTEL course Appreciating Linguistics: A typological approach.

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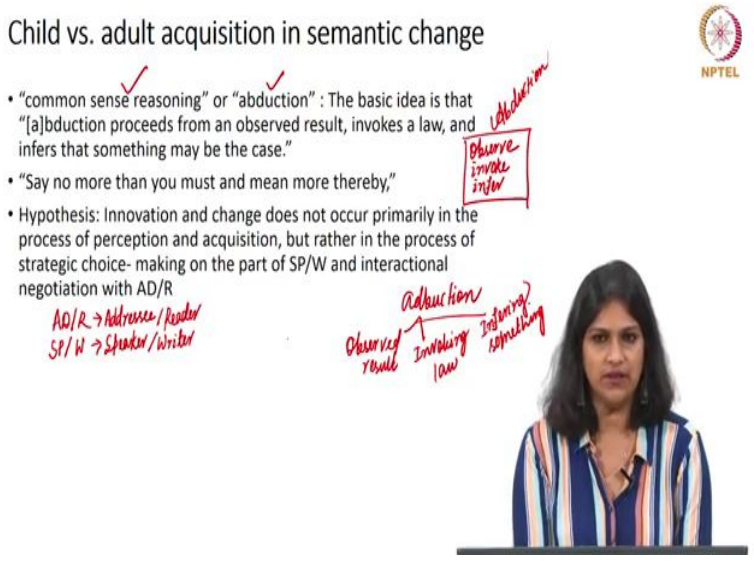

So, in this connection now since we realize that when you are talking about innovation maybe we can give equal credit to both the children and the adults.

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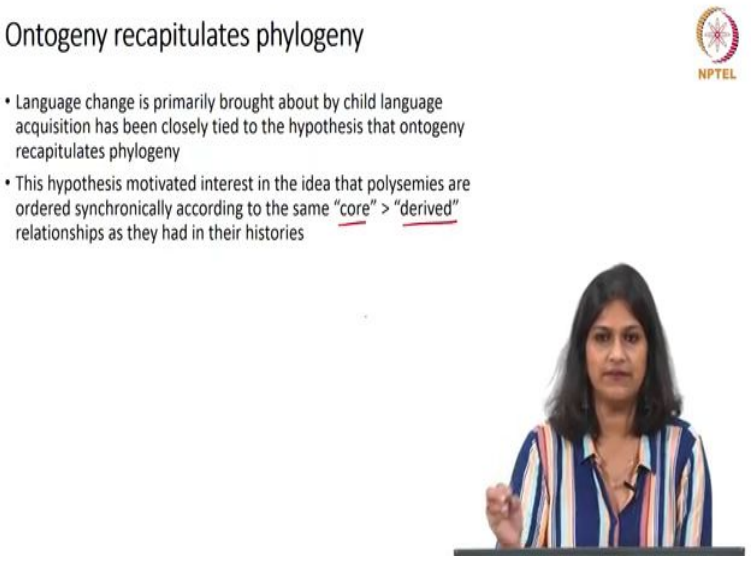

However, if you look at the generativist approach of language, it does give a lot of emphasis or it emphasizes on the creativity of children. The whole world of language when a child is able to speak or a child is able to use language in such a complex way like such complex words and phrases can be easily acquired by the language. So, that means, a lot of credit should go to the children, that is what the generativist is would claim that a child is actually the real creative soul here.

With just a limited set of linguistic input that they have they can form very complex phrases or words and they can also communicate very complex expressions with just the use of a handful of data that they have in hand. So, keeping that argument in mind all these issues related like the terms like innateness hypothesis or language acquisition device. So, these are the generativist terms.

What we are going to do now? What we are trying to understand? How language change has been understood from the generativist point of view or let us say this ontogeny-phylogeny relatio? This hypothesis is ontogeny-phylogeny hypothesis which says that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. If you look at it from a biologist's point of view, it is the individual changes contribute to a bigger change.

One particular change in some organism an individual some changes in individual organism eventually result in a bigger change in that particular species. So, that is the biological hypothesis as far as ontogeny and phylogeny is concerned. If you apply it in the language domain, the hypothesis would be something like this. Language change is primarily brought about by child language acquisition which has been closely tied to the hypothesis that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. So, what does it mean?

If we try to apply it in the language domain how would we understand? We would understand that the acquisition by individuals and here acquisition related to the children. So, the acquisition by child individuals recapitulates language change. So, the way each individual has acquired the language that eventually results in a massive change in the language.

So, the generativist version would be this is a hypothesis which is designed in part to test the Chomskyan new performationism. The concern here is that whatever language change is happening, what is the semantic change happening for a particular word or a phrase, it goes to the change at the language acquisition level.

The children are the ones who bring the change. That is why we call ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny; that means, the acquisition by individuals recapitulates the language change. So, that is the whole idea about ontogeny phylogeny relation. And, this hypothesis, what has it done? It has motivated interest in the idea that the polysemous nature of words are ordered synchronically, forget about the diachronic aspect of it. If a particular word has been polysemous then the development has happened at a synchronic level.

Diachronically we are not really going to focus on this issue. As far as the semantic change of a particular phrase is concerned or the polysemous relation of a particular phrase is concerned; that means, it has happened at a synchronic level and the development has become from core to derived. So, there has been a core meaning of this particular phrase and besides that, we also had got a couple of derived meanings.

The development or the process from the core to derived is a part of this hypothesis. The ontogeny and phylogeny relation can be related with the core to derived relationship or the interpretation.

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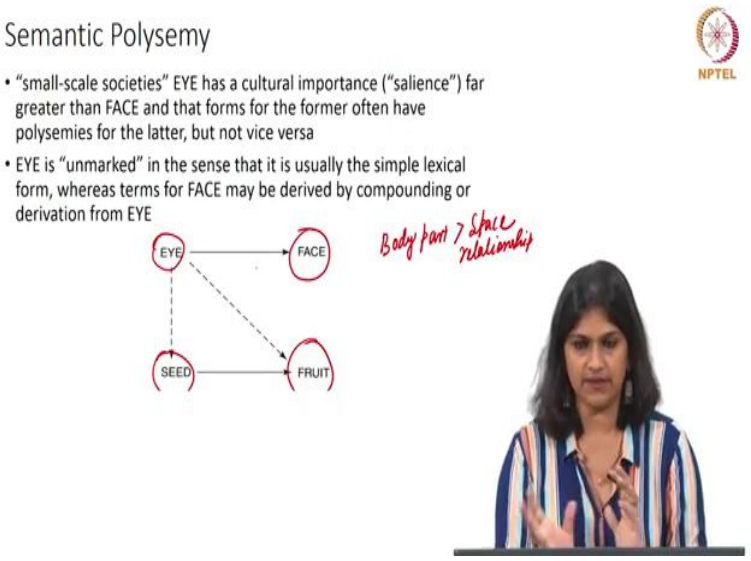

So, let us see how it works. Let us look at the kind of examples given over here one is eye and face, then it is seed and. Look at the four words which have been used here. Let us see how polysemy has been accounted for in this ontogeny phylogeny relation. So, eye as a word is a polysemous word because it might have multiple meanings; it might have the meaning of just a body part and it can also become related to cultural importance. So, when you are thinking about eye, it does have a lot of cultural relation associated with it.

So, if you try to find out the semantic representation of eye, how it has developed. This has developed from being just a body part to space relationships. I am not sure about Hindi, but at least in my language, I speak Odia which is an Indo-Aryan language. Eye has a domain of space relationship. If I say somebody is far away from me, I can say that my eyes cannot see him.

If my eyes cannot see him; that means that has a space relationship with this. This has gone so far that I am not able to see. The semantics of just being a body part has been extended to some other domains as well. Now let us look at this. In case of small scale societies the eye has a cultural importance and why it is culturally important? It is one of the most salient body parts in the face.

In a human face eyes have a very significant role to play and your eyes are one of the most important organs and that is the reason why we can say that the polysemies meaning that eye has, does say a lot of things about the semantic change.

What happens if you compare eye with face, the eye which is a part of the face has been more polysemous than the face. Face is a bigger set, eye is just one element of it, but eye is more polysemous than the face. Face does not have much polysemy as eyes have. So, that is the concern. In this case eye is unmarked and this unmarked eye is just a simple lexical format, just a body part, but when you look at eye or when you look at face, face may be derived by compounding or derivation from eye.

The idea here is that the core versus derived, face is the derivation, eye is the core component or eye is unmarked which is a simple lexical item whereas, the face is basically the derived form of it. When you say the face as your body part is a bigger set and and eye as also a body part which is a part of your face. So, the core derived relation can easily be understood by looking at the eye and face relation.

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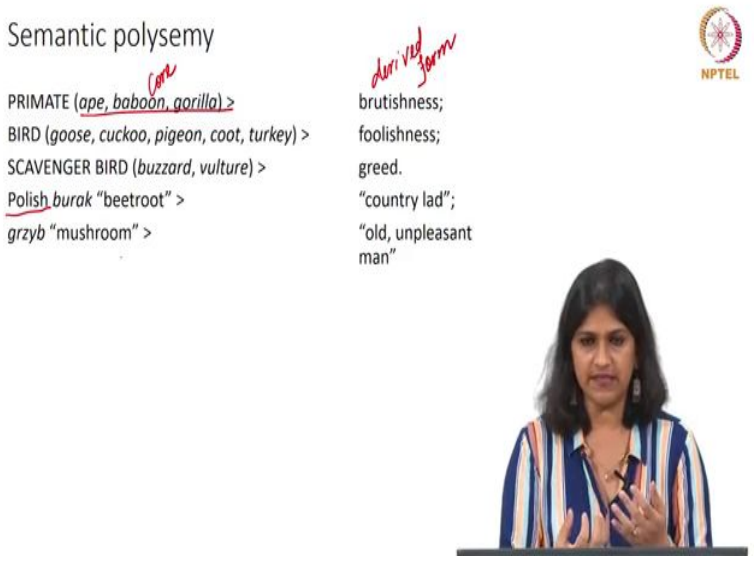

Now, let us see how this semantic polysemy is working in case of certain other words and I told you we are going to see the semantic change. Because of the polysemous relation that these words have, what sort of changes do they bring? Let us look at the first word we have

primate. Primate is ape, baboon or gorilla. These are the primates, but then the word primate whose core meaning is this, this is the core meaning and this is the derived form.

How did the semantic change happen typologically and I am sure this would also be in most of the other languages in the world. So, primate whose core meaning is ape or baboon or gorilla, the derived meaning has been brutishness. When you say primate behavior; primate behavior is not just the behavior of an ape or a baboon or a gorilla rather it has become a generic term or more inclusive term for brutishness.

Similar is the case with bird. Goose can be a bird, a cuckoo can be a bird, a pigeon can be a bird, all of them are birds, but the the core meaning of bird has been derived or the core meaning which might include all these things turkey or pigeon or cuckoo or goose, that it derives, it is derived actually to indicate foolishness. Most of the birds are considered to be foolish in some cases; they are not very clever unless you are a crow.

Then the scavenger bird, the scavenger bird which is buzzard and vulture. Vulture as a scavenger bird has a derived meaning of greed. If I say he is a vulture that does not mean that he is actually a vulture, he is literally a vulture, not really. The representation or the interpretation of being a vulture is mainly showing your greed. So, if you are greedy, you might behave like a vulture.

Similarly, there are two other examples. These are all English examples. Then we have Polish examples. Burak means beetroot which means country lad who is uncouth, less fashionable, less smart. And, the second word I do not know how to read this. The spelling is g grzyb, that is a phonemic representation if I can say; that means, mushroom.

Mushroom in Polish, the derived meaning has become old or an unpleasant man. So, something which is not pleasant to the eyes anymore, which has become fragile, which has become old, aged. So, these are the semantic polysemous relations. How the development has happened you see I am sure this kind of a development will also hold true for many of the world's languages.

Primate behavior means brutishness that it shows, bird means a foolish attitude, scavenger bird means full of greed, beetroot for example, in Polish it means a country lad I do not know

how many other languages would accept it, mushroom would give you an unpleasant look, generally mushrooms are not considered to be very pleasant to look at.

This kind of semantic change you might see that or you might encounter it in a lot of other languages. So, that is what I would say for the moment as far as semantic typology is concerned. Semantic typology primarily is related to semantic change and this semantic change I have already discussed in the morphological typology section specially related to neologism including or adding new words to the lexicon, changing or the narrowing of the meaning. All these are a part of semantic change.

So, what have we discussed so far as far as semantic typology is concerned? First thing that you need to realize or you need to understand about semantic typology is that unlike other typological generalizations, it is difficult for a semanticist to come up with those kind of numerical generalizations.

We have not discussed any such crosslinguistic generalization rather we have discussed what are the different methods by which semantic change happens, whether the languages of the world something similar, such a phenomenon is`or can be identified or not and I assume that a lot of world's languages would also would also go through similar sort of changes.

As far as changes are concerned or development has been concerned, we have discussed the diachrony as well as synchrony. At the diachrony we did take or we did observe data from Latin from classical Latin to the vulgar Latin or colloquial Latin whatever you might say and on the other hand we have the child language as well as the adult language acquisition. The development from the child language to the adult language acquisition we have such kind of a change or a difference.

One is the diachronic level, the other one is the synchronic level. At the diachronic level, the data shows how the demonstratives or the definiteness markers have changed; the first person or the second person demonstrative has become first person, sometimes the reflexives have changed their meaning. So, those kind of changes are coming in the diachronic study of semantic change. At the synchronic level we did study the child versus adult language acquisition.

I forgot in the diachronic level we did discuss metonymzation and metaphorization. How these two are used in a broader sense to come or to let us know that semantic changes have been happening all over the languages in the world or it might have happened or it might have been happening. In case of child versus adult language acquisition we did talk about innovation. Which one is more innovative? What does the bioprogram hypothesis say? Bio program hypothesis says that the children are more innovative, taking into account the data from the Hawaiian Creole.

The adults contribute to the development of creole, but it is actually the children who spread it and the other side of the story is ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. The individual changes result in bigger changes. So, my suggestion for you would be, we should understand that both the children and adults have their own share of contribution to bring the semantic change or the semantic development.

But if you go by the generativist idea it is primarily the children who are more creative, who are more innovative and who bring the change to the language up to a certain extent, but that does not mean that we would undermine the contribution of the adult speakers of a particular language. Both the domain child language acquisition and adult language acquisition have their own contribution to bring the semantic change.

Then, the third thing, some instances of semantic change or semantic polysemy where we have seen that eye versus face relationship, eye is unmarked. It is more simple as far as being a lexical item that it is and whereas, terms for face may be derived by compounding or derivation from the eye. So, that means, in different languages of the world the term for face has been derived adding the words for eyes into it may be the holder of the eye or the place of the eyes or whatever. So, eyes are unmarked and face is the derivation of eye which has been formed via compounding.

So, the words for eye and the words for face; eye is rudimentary face is the derivation. That is what we have seen as far as semantic polysemy is concerned. Besides that the primates, the birds, the scavenger birds, these are also the words; there has been a certain core meaning and then there is a derived form.

So, as far as core meaning is concerned, primate could be ape, baboon, gorilla and the derived form indicates or it symbolizes brutishness. Similar is the case with birds, they are very innocent, something like goose, cuckoo and turkey and that indicates the derived form of foolishness. Scavenger bird, vulture; that means, greed. So, if you say he is a vulture, that does not mean that he is literally a vulture, he is basically a greedy person.

These are the English data, on the other hand we have the Polish data where beetroot means a country lad, who is not much smart, is not very fashionable, very organic and sort of not very street smart kind of a person. Similar is the case the word used in Polish for mushroom means old and unpleasant. So, these are the derived form as far as semantic polysemy is concerned and both say children and adults would have their own contribution to bring in the semantic change.

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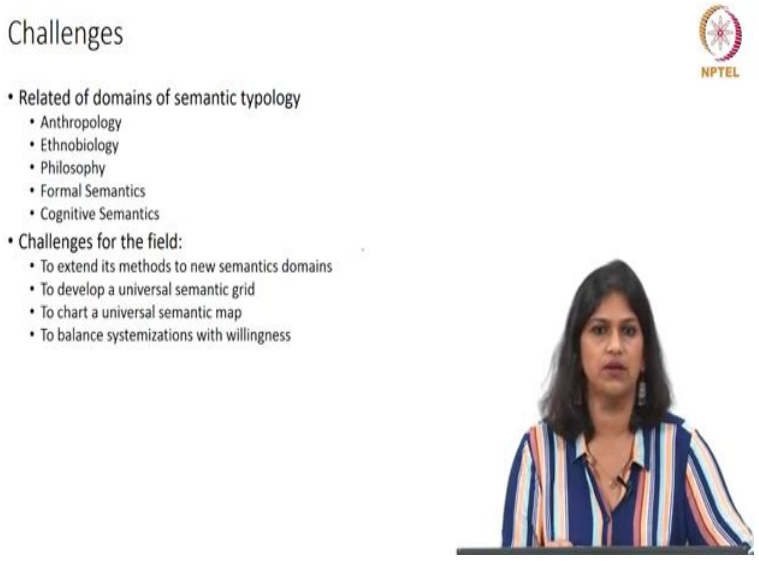

So, that is about semantic typology. I would just briefly talk about what are the challenges that semantic typology as an academic discipline faces. There has been quite a lot of related disciplines that we have if you try to understand the semantic change, this is like let us say anthropology, ethnobiology, philosophy, formal semantics, cognitive semantics. These are all related disciplines which semantic typology deals with.

An anthropologist also tries to find out what kind of typological changes on the words, on the phrases have gone through. Similar is the case with an ethnobiologist, a philosopher, a formal semanticist, as well as a cognitive semanticist. All these disciplines talk about semantic typology. On the other hand this particular field which has not really been widely studied so far because I told you a lot of semanticists do not consider them themselves as topologists. And they do not even consider this is a typological study.

Semantic typology is so abstract by nature that in most of the cases it does not look like a typologist's work. So, what are the challenges the field is facing and which needs further intervention is that all these methods that we have discussed very briefly there are more into it I have just given you a very brief overview. We have to extend these methods to new semantic domains, formal domain, cognitive domain, anthropological domain, biological domain or philosophical domain. All these methods have to be extended.

The semanticists have to develop a universal semantic grid, so that on that basis we can categorize or we can type the languages and this category or type or putting the languages in types would help us to understand semantic typology better and semantic typology should be able to chart a universal semantic map which has not been done yet, but these are the advanced level questions or advanced level issues I do not want you to understand these things immediately, but just have an idea that these are the challenges that semantic typology as a discipline faces.

And, finally, there has to be a balance which would systematize with willingness. People who are working on semantic typology or semantics, they should also focus on the empirical aspect of it. Though this is a highly abstract domain of linguistics, the empirical evidences should also be taken into account more seriously, and if we can do that there would be a systematic study.

So, if the challenges can be overcome then semantic typology would flourish in a better way or it will be more inclusive or it is going to be more robust as a discipline much like syntactic, morphological and phonological typological questions that we have dealt with. That means the generalizations that we have had for world's languages, semantic typology should also

help us to come up or the researchers who are working in this domain should give us an idea how crosslinguistic generalizations can be drawn.

With this, I finish my discussion on semantic typology. I request you to refer to this book Regularity in Semantic Change, it is published by Cambridge University Press. The authors are Elizabeth Closs Traugott and the authors are Elizabeth Closs Traugott and Richard B. Dasher. Please refer to this book; maybe the initial few couple of chapters, I do not expect you to read it entirely, but at least some sort of ideas you should get from Traugott and Dasher's book.

Thank you.

Keywords: innateness hypothesis, ontology, phylogeny, polysemy, core relation, derived relation, semantic grid